



GENDER REPRESENTATION FOR DEVELOPMENT IN MYANMAR MEDIA (2010-2014)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how the media in Myanmar has covered gender issues from 2010 to 2014, exercised media freedom, and engaged with gender organizations. The research also examines the role of media in gender development in Myanmar. This research involves media content analysis to examine the representation of women in decision-making, economic participation, and social and security affairs. In addition, semi-structured interviews with gender representatives from development agencies are utilized to explore the engagement of gender development organizations with the media. The study found that media coverage regarding gender related issues increased from 47 reports in 2010 to 67 reports in 2014. Though media coverage about gender increased in number, their content can relay different meanings. Among these new reports, the most common were the stories of empowerment, focusing on women's involvement in decision-making and the economy. In terms of social and security issues, the media has sought to promote public awareness about women's security. Despite these improvements, gender stereotyping is still evident, in particular, with portrayals of women as vulnerable in conflict-related reports. This research has also found that gender organizations and the media need to collaborate in order to incorporate gender-related guidelines into current media laws – such as regulations to reduce gender stereotyping and the devaluing of women.

List of Abbreviations

CEDAW	The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
GAD	Gender and Development
GEN	Gender Equality Network
GII	Gender Inequality Index
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Questioning
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MJN	Myanmar Journalist Network
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WID	Women in Development

1. Introduction

1.1. Problem identification

The media is a key social agent that often reinforces social, political, and economic norms and traditions.[\[1\]](#) On the other hand, the media can be a powerful tool for advocacy and education, as well as a method for introducing and debating new policies and practices. Media engagement with women and development issues can help to support social justice reforms and lead to greater gender equality. In terms of empowerment, the media can help women engage in community issues beyond the household and gain awareness to help change established perspectives. The media has been recognized as an essential tool in achieving equality between men and women in contemporary societies since the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.[\[2\]](#)

In order to hear the real voices of women from the bottom, women’s rights to communication should be “understood, respected, and implemented” – with a view to bring about social change in the media.[\[3\]](#) In this light, Eva Solomon advocates for “development journalism,” which takes a people-oriented approach to stories, and encourages people to get involved in communication processes and news production.[\[4\]](#) Development journalism encourages community empowerment by engaging with communities and providing access to reliable and unbiased information, as well as diverse perspectives. A “gender focus” within development journalism involves participatory communication by engaging

with different voices and perspectives of ordinary men and women in order to foster well-being. This practice of communication for gender development emphasizes the reduction of human inequality in development; including political, economic, social, and poverty spheres. Given the capacity for media to create change, media approaches should be examined in order to understand how the media can represent the advancement of marginal groups from a development journalism perspective.

1.2. Research background

Myanmar, also known as Burma, borders China, Laos, Thailand, Bangladesh, and India. According to the 2014 census, 51.5 million people (51.8% female and 48.2% male) reside in the nation.[5] The literacy rate stands at 89.5% (86.9% for female, and 92.6% for male). The employment to population ratio age 15-64 is recorded at 81.9% for males and 48.4% for females. Myanmar was listed as a least developed country since 1987. In terms of gender relations, Myanmar was ranked 83 out of 149 for Gender Inequality Index in 2013, down from 80 in 2012, despite the end of the military dictatorship in 2010.[6]

Myanmar ratified the CEDAW convention in 1997, and as part of the convention's obligations, Myanmar has committed to laws that uphold women's rights and promote women's security and equality in political and economic participation.[7] According to the 1947, 1974, and 2008 constitution, women have equal rights with men in the

economic, social, and political spheres. However, social discrimination remains deeply rooted. Traditional proverbs provide a historical context. For instance, the sayings, "an intelligent woman cannot establish a village alone, no matter how intelligent she is," and, "a good man or husband can have one thousand concubines," support and reinforce patriarchal divides.[8] Moreover, marriage, divorce, and inheritance are still practiced according to local customs and traditions, and are evident among ethnic minority groups as well. According to cultural norms, Myanmar women are inferior to men, as men are believed to possess *Bhone* (the superior power). These social norms undermine and limit the role of women in community decision making and political roles. Currently, female representation in the House of National Level Parliament in Myanmar is the lowest among ASEAN countries, at 5.79 per cent.[9] The Myanmar Women's Forum in 2013 recommended increasing women participation to at least 30% in the administrative, legislative, and judicial sectors of the parliament.[10]

Women also face challenges relating to a lack of maternal and child healthcare and security. Although the government has promoted reproductive health awareness through the National Health Plan, maternal death and childhood mortality remains high, due to inadequate health services and facilities in the remote areas. Furthermore, the Gender Equality Network reports that domestic violence and sexual harassment and assault are major issues which Myanmar women experience in their daily lives.[11] Reports from the

Myanmar police indicated that rape cases have almost doubled from 377 in 2010 to 605 in 2011, and 654 cases in 2012.[12] Burma Campaign UK also found evidence of sexual violence towards ethnic minority women, with rape being utilized a weapon by the military. [13]

Currently, development agencies in Myanmar have accelerated their efforts in advocating to the government and enhancing gender awareness. Gender development advocacy through the media also faces challenges, due to a legacy of restrictions on the freedom of expression for five decades. During four years of democratic transition, from 2010 to 2014, gender became a sensitive issue. Although media censorship has been eased and gender awareness has been promoted by the development agencies, nationalist forces and extreme Buddhists continue to believe that women's roles need to be limited in order to retain national prestige and integrity, and to protect against interfaith marriage and polygamy. In this light, the media can be a powerful medium for raising different gender perspectives for both gender progressive and oppressive views.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The relation of gender, media and development in international context

Gender is a product of social and cultural settings that generate the norms and characteristics of masculinity and femininity, and has the power to create social hierarchies. Characteristics such as “competitive,” “strong,” “rational,”

“dominant,” and “aggressive” are typically identified as masculine behavior, whereas feminine characteristics include “caring,” “emotional,” “weak,” “loving,” and “gentle.”[14] Rebecca Ann Lind and Colleen Salo indicate that gender roles are socially constructed, and based on stereotypical gender norms which include the belief that roles and responsibilities are designated to specific genders – for example, positions of power, such as “politician” and “manager” are for men, while “secretary” and “homemaker” are jobs for women.[15] However, Rosalind Gill explains that the content of gender roles can change over time in any society, falling in line with the changes in public perspectives or, with the shift of political or economic ideologies.[16] The mass media is a social cognitive tool for gender development, since media dispatches can shape public perceptions of gender roles.[17]

Since the 1970s, the United Nations (UN) and international community have emphasized the importance of equality between men and women. The 4th Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 recognized that gender sensitizing via the media should be a priority, in order to increase women's rights and roles in political, social, economic, and cultural spheres.[18]

Gender developmental approaches have been progressed over decades. In the 1980s, the approach shifted to WID to GAD, because the WID approach was criticized for being too influenced by Western ideologies of female oppression. GAD approaches have been linked to Third World Feminism and acknowledge women as active agents of economic, political,

and cultural improvements, rather than passive recipients of development aid.[19] In this light, women's empowerment in economic, social, cultural, and political sectors was put at the heart of development agenda. Beyond GAD, gender development concepts shifted towards a women's rights perspective, as reflected by CEDAW and MDGs. Promotion of gender equality and women empowerment, and improving maternal health have been at the core of the MDGs – with emphasis on the improvement of social and cultural rights, and the decision making power of women in developing countries.[20]

As noted by Barbara Heron, the social justice needs of women in the developed world and developing world are different.[21] Social discrimination based on class and race/ethnicity are the most challenging issues encountered by women from the Global South. Moreover, women in poorer countries are fighting for rights to access education, proper reproductive health, participation in community affairs, and the creation of a secure environment. In contrast, women in developed countries are demanding for equal rights in payment and positions in the employment sector and political participation. This trend shows that women's movements in developed countries are more focused on social advancement, while those in the developing world are struggling for survival, justice, and basic needs. With regards to women empowerment in developing countries, Aruna Rao states that development initiatives often need to focus on women's basic needs and rights and should respect the local cultures, rather

than challenging culturally sensitive norms in a direct way.[22] Rao argues that gender advocates should frame their objectives with consideration to the strengths and weaknesses of particular bureaucracies.[23] For instance, encouraging governments in developing countries to provide education and healthcare services for women are more optimistic and diplomatic than blaming them for not working towards gender equality goals.

Although advocacy for gender mainstreaming aims for both institutional and social transformation, Rao claims that bureaucracies are often not effective agents for social transformation.[24] In this regard, advocacy through the media needs to highlight not only gender development policy strengthening and institutional changes with gender mainstreaming, but also needs to encourage the empowerment of women at the grassroots level. Having said that, while grassroots participation is required for human development projects, Jill Johannessen suggests that it is necessary to involve women as subjects, rather than objects of development.[25] This means that women should be given a greater control over resources and opportunities in order to take part in decision-making and the processes that influence their lives. With regards to empowerment, development journalism can stimulate the media to reveal women's capabilities and achievement, rather than just focusing on suffering and struggle. According to Solomon, development journalism can engage with the voices of ordinary people by promoting their personal stories.[26] In this respect,

development journalism is appreciated as an important and holistic approach to bring about gender equality, by addressing both bureaucratic issues and grassroots empowerment.

In addition, Trish Williams points out that advocacy work through the media should also combat gender discrimination in text and images, as well as content.^[27] Sherrie Inness argues that printed media often reinforces feminine stereotypes.^[28] This reinforcing of femininity may have two meanings. Media dispatches on women's sufferings might strengthen the stereotype of women as victims. On the other hand, the focus on this suffering could be seen as an attempt to raise community awareness. Thus, three points need to be considered when conducting media analysis on gender representation: (1) what is the purpose of the media's contribution?; (2) how does media coverage represent the development of marginalized women?; and (3) how can media coverage influence the gender development policy for improvement, institutional change, and social transformation?

In this light, the capacity of media persons and their knowledge about gender theories need to be enhanced to reduce any form of gender discrimination in their contributions. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action provided recommendations for prohibiting sexist media content and stereotypical representation; revealing inequity, suffering, and gender inequality issues; addressing particular subjects important to women; contributing a

balanced and diverse representation of women in the media; promoting the role of female journalists in the newsroom; and advocating for gender sensitive journalism to media stakeholders. Following these objectives, contemporary gender and media projects are trying to monitor the media's contributions, promote media literacy regarding gender, provide advocacy and lobby media persons to explore challenges, define approaches for media reform, and provide guidelines for gender sensitive journalism.^[29]

The different literature suggests the need for a two-pronged approach to improve gender representation in media contributions. First, the media should explore stories of women from the bottom with development journalism as a means of encouraging and empowering their voices. Second, the media should be aware of the guidelines for gender sensitive journalism to reduce gender stereotypes.

2.2. Gender and the roles of media in Myanmar's context

Gender development via the media in Myanmar has been a challenge during the transition period, because of a greater focus on economic and political changes. Gender and women-focused issues have not received much attention, as these issues have been considered less important. Moreover, the development of media lagged behind due to media control by the government for a long period of time. Journalistic freedom in Myanmar was limited for almost five decades, starting in 1962. Although the democratic transition started in

2010, the pre-publication censorship of print news media ended as late as August 2012.[30] According to the 2015 World Press Freedom Index of Reporters Without Borders, Myanmar improved from 174th out of 178th place in 2010, to 144th in 2015. Media freedom may result in greater publication of articles highlighting gender equality. However, Aniruddha Mitra et al. argue that despite the removal of state controls, the media itself may be institutionalized to perpetuate gender biases.[31]

Women and media is one of the major components of the National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women, which is aimed at enhancing gender awareness for the public through the media. Yet, Dilrukshi Handunnetti argues that current Myanmar portrayal of women in the media seems to reinforce stereotypes with dominant representations of females as family figures/homemakers or as victims.[32] Gender organizations in Myanmar have approached media outlets in order to incorporate content and articles focused on gender development. However, the most challenging issue they are experiencing is the manifestation of nationalist ideology, which promotes women as responsible for national prestige and integrity. In 2012, the Nationalist Party proposed a law to ban interfaith marriage between Buddhist women and non-Buddhist men, forcing these women to convert to their husband's religion.[33] Chie Ikeya states that in the 1930s, the nationalist movement utilized newspapers, magazines, and cartoons to target women wearing foreign-imported costumes in order to mock them as national traitors.

[34] History is repeated again; but more recently, gender activists have a comprehensive plan for women's advancement, which can combat nationalist ideology. Different communication channels are being sought to raise voices, needs, and concerns of the women from the grassroots as well as to highlight the importance of their development. In this respect, research is required to explore the recent gender representation in media through texts and contents, and their contribution to development efforts.

3. Theoretical Approach

3.1. Gender and Critical Communication Theory

Engaging with media critical theory, Sue Curry Jansen highlights two important elements in order to examine how the media influences its audiences.[35] First, the sociological analysis of formations and structures of knowledge and power through media is required. Second, cultural analysis is required to explore hegemonic and counter-hegemonic processes, whereby mediated messages attain meaning and exercise power. As noted by Jansen, languages, keywords, images, and content in media contributions are the most effective agent to reproduce knowledge and power, and to introduce ideas, ideologies, and theories.

Social constructivism is the key ontology within critical communication theory and is concerned with the social process of producing meaning.[36] According to Stuart Hall's

“encoding/decoding” model, media agents ‘encode’ meaning into their text, depending on the social context, and readers interpret those texts by ‘decoding’ them into different meanings, based on their own social context.[37] In the study of gender and media, “encoding/decoding” approaches help to explore how the media creates certain formations of gender roles, masculinity, femininity, and gender development.[38]

In examining media engagement for the purpose of communication for social change, research needs to consider two key factors: participatory communication and gender power analyses. Development journalism acknowledges the voices of marginalized people and provides avenues for sharing stories of empowerment. Development journalism can create spaces for marginalized groups to raise their voices.[39] Thus, the media can convey the messages of marginalized groups and campaigners to decision and policy makers.

In order to examine how media outlets can empower marginalized women, a critical communication approach can be used to understand development journalism. Such an approach would include analyzing the use of keywords, content, presentation, and female participation in story contributions. Thus, a critical communication approach requires gender power analysis, and the way in which the media engages with women in diverse groups. In the analysis of gender power relations in the Global South, development journalism needs to observe how women are positioned differently within power relations. Barbara Heron reminds us that the experiences of diverse groups of women, across race/

ethnicity and class, cannot be generalized.[40] In the Global South, women’s program interventions need to consider differences in class and race/ethnicity as important factors in understanding how power is distributed. In this study of gender representation in the media, the way of constructing knowledge was investigated by content analysis based on a social constructivist perspective and informed by critical communication theory. A development journalism perspective is applied to explore the different ways in which the media represents women of different race/ethnicity and class.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Approach

In the study of gender development and the media, agencies such as Global Alliance for Media and Gender investigate three areas: media coverage about gender, gender representation in newsrooms, and impacts on the audiences.[41] This research examines only the role of print media in Myanmar in promoting gender development. The study engages a qualitative approach to examine media coverage regarding gender. By employing critical communication theory with a social constructivist methodology, the study aims to generate an in-depth understanding of the background and social context of Myanmar society. Accordingly, the study focused on two main research questions:

1) *How did Myanmar's print media portray gender roles from 2010 to 2014 in order to improve decision making power, economic participation, social affairs (health and education), and security?*

2) *How do gender development organizations engage with the media for gender development in Myanmar?*

4.2. Data Sampling and Collection

The main research questions for this study are related to the ways in which Myanmar's media portrayed gender roles from 2010 to 2014, and, the relation between gender, media, and development works in Myanmar. The investigation on media dispatches through content analysis is aimed at revealing gender representation in development issues by print media outlets. By means of semi-structured interviews, the research aims to obtain the required data to respond to the second research question.

a) Content Analysis

The national weekly paper, *The Myanmar Times*, was selected as a sample case study for content analysis. With the purpose of an in-depth case study, the research investigates this single unit case over time, reviewing publications of *The Myanmar Times* from 2010 (the initial year of democratic transition period), in 2012 (the year of censorship ended) and 2014 (the recent year). *The Myanmar Times* has been

published since 2000 by the Myanmar Consolidated Media Company, established with the joint shares by Myanmar (51%) and Australia (49%). It is the only weekly paper published in both Myanmar and English languages, and the main subscribers are government organizations, embassies, international organizations, and community centers. The local Myanmar version has 68 pages published on Thursdays, while the 40-page English version is circulated on Mondays. The paper has a circulation of about 3,000 copies in English and over 25,000 copies in Myanmar per week. The topics covered include national and international news, in-depth stories and articles, opinions, politics, property and business, technology, travel, life and style, and sports. Moreover, Myanmar Consolidated Media publishes a special paper every month with the supplementary pages featuring specific issues such as "Education," "Technology," "Culture," "Women," and "Health." Through content analysis, this study has explored the media portrayal of women in *The Myanmar Times* (Myanmar Version) by selecting their special issues for analysis. The special issues were chosen for analysis in this case study, because they are longer in length, and thus are more likely to include articles that touch on women's issues. Accordingly, the case study analyzed the media dispatch of 36 special issues of *The Myanmar Times* for specific three years: 2010, 2012 and 2014 (12 special issues for each year).

b) Semi-structured Interview

Semi-structured interviews have been conducted with representatives from NGOs, selected using a purposive

sampling approach. As suggested by Jennifer Mason and Imelda Coyne, the target participants of purposeful sampling are selected according to strategic criteria.[42] Firstly, interviewees must be gender representatives from local gender organizations. The reason for choosing local gender representatives from local organization is that those people are believed to have better understanding about Myanmar's social, cultural, and political context. Moreover, these participants are friendly and familiar with local publications. Secondly, since gender is not about only women, the study has aimed to include both male and female voices. Among over thirty international and local gender organizations, the research chose four local gender representatives whose organizations met the following criteria: 1) most actively working in gender development programs; 2) has a strong relationship with media and is represented in the media; and 3) is closely engaged with community based gender organizations.

In line with the research purpose and questions, an interview guide was prepared. The interview questions relate to three main topics: 1) The changes in gender representation in the media from 2010 to 2014, including questions about the changes in content, text, and images; 2) The engagement of gender organizations with media, with questions about policy, advocacy works, strategic plans, and recommendations; and 3) The influence of media in gender development, with questions about achievements and drawbacks that impacted people, policy makers, and gender organizations.

4.3. Data Analysis

David Altheide suggests that media analysis should reflect the research objectives, main research questions, and theoretical approach.[43] Based on the critical communication theory, the research questions were prepared to explore the ways in which the media engages with gender development and the role of development agencies.

Content analysis is the key data analysis approach for examining media articles from a social constructivist perspective. The words, text, content, and images the media used in *The Myanmar Times* articles have been critically analyzed. By means of Hall's "encoding/decoding" model, the key words and semiotics were decoded to interpret the meanings that reflect the newspaper's perspective, and its possible influence on social roles and power creation of people.[44] The content analysis was aimed to respond to the first research question; "How did Myanmar's print media portray gender roles from 2010 to 2014 (in order to improve decision making power, economic participation, social affairs (health and education), and security?" Thus the data was examined based on the following categories: "women and decision making power," "women and economic participation," "women and social affairs (health and education)," and "women and security". To link with these categories, the data obtained from media coverage was categorized according to: date of media contribution; title of publication; categories; themes (neutral/ education/ advocacy/ empowerment/ stereotyping); brief description;

key words; and “remark.”[45] The results include qualitative data - capturing definitions, meanings, and types, as well as numerical data, for instance, how many articles are contributed to focused topics, in order to supplement understanding and interpretations.[46] In addition to data analysis, the study also took into the account of the ways gender representation differed according to class and race/ethnicity; and the representation of women as either object or subject.

For data analysis of semi-structured interviews, the study used categorization analysis. The researcher identified nine key categories after reviewing the responses of the gender development representatives thoroughly.[47] These categories become initial themes that align with the main interview questions. First, “purpose of the use of media;” “focused topics;” “perspective of media coverage about gender;” and “opinion on changing media trend” categories were put under the theme of “the perspectives of the respondents regarding the changes to gender representation in media from 2010 to 2014”. Second, “recent engagement of the gender organization with the media;” “future plans of the organization;” and “policy recommendation for the improvement of media engagement” categories were linked to the theme of “the engagement of gender organization with media”. Finally, under the theme of “the influence of media in gender development”, the categories such as “perspective on the role of media for gender development” and “experiences

of gender organization in media engagement (both challenges and achievements)” were included.

5. Findings

5.1. Findings from content analysis

In the content analysis, the investigation focused on gender representations in Myanmar media in terms of “decision-making,” “economic participation,” “social” (health and education), and “security” issues from 2010 to 2014. In decoding media contribution, the use of words, semiotics, and content were analyzed to explore meaning. According to findings, most of the media’s contributions were presented as a form of brief news, articles, and features; but the paper included a small number of analysis articles with a gender perspective.[48] Analysis regarding laws and practices that limit women’s roles and rights, and thus threaten women’s

YEAR/ CATEGORY	DECISION MAKING	ECONOMIC PARTICIPA TION	SOCIAL (HEALTH & EDUCATION)	SECURITY	TOTAL
2010	9	15	17	6	47
2012	28	11	11	20	70
2014	11	18	14	24	67
Total	48	44	42	50	184

Table 1: Gender Representation in the Myanmar Times’ Contribution (2010-2014)

GENDER REPRESENTATION/ CATEGORY	DECISION MAKING			ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION			SOCIAL (HEALTH & EDUCATION)			SECURITY			TOTAL MEDIA COVERAGE
	2010	2012	2014	2010	2012	2014	2010	2012	2014	2010	2012	2014	
Neutral	5	17	3	1	5	4	3	1	2	2	2	9	54
Education (or) Awareness			1		1	1	5	6	6	1	6	10	37
Advocacy			1	1	1				1		4		8
Empowerment	2	10	6	2	3	11	6	4	5		1	1	51
Gender Stereotyping	2	1		11	1	3	2			3	7	4	34
Total													184

TABLE 2: GENDER REPRESENTATION IN FOUR CATEGORIES PERTAINING TO DEVELOPMENT RELATED ISSUES IN THE MYANMAR TIMES CONTRIBUTION (2010-2014)

YEAR/ CATEGORY	DECISION MAKING	ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION	SOCIAL (HEALTH & EDUCATION)	SECURITY	TOTAL
2010	9	15	17	6	47
2012	28	11	11	20	70
2014	11	18	14	24	67
TOTAL	48	44	42	50	184

TABLE 3: GENDER REPRESENTATION IN THE MYANMAR TIMES' CONTRIBUTION (2010-2014)

security, were few. Rather, the study found that the majority of articles were presented from a gender-neutral perspective – as in, it may have discussed women, but lacked a specific

gender focus or analysis, focusing more on human interest. For instance, “Aung San Suu Kyi picked her son up at the airport on his arrival” (Vol 28, Issue 553, November, 2010); or

“An orphan has been adopted by a woman doing commercial surrogacy” (Vol 35, Issue 684, July, 2014). Based on the findings, messages given in the articles were categorized into five key types: 1) Neutral message (there is no gender perspective in the news); 2) Education/Awareness; 3) Advocacy; 4) Empowerment; and 5) Stereotyping. In addition, the study analyzed how media contributions regarding gender represented marginalized groups according to class and race/ethnicity; for example, media representation related to women from ethnic minorities and from small religious groups in Myanmar.

The research also investigated the inclusion of women’s ‘voices,’ including the use of women’s portraits, and news and features that focused on women’s issues. According to Table 1, the rate of contribution of the news related to women’s issues by The Myanmar Times increased by 30% from 2010 to 2014. In 2010, women related stories were mainly related to women and social (health and education) issues. In 2012, the paper mainly focused on women and decision making, with a significant shift to women and security topics in 2014. Among the four key categories, gender representation in the news coverage regarding economic participation remained moderate. Articles were then categorized in terms of their representation of women, using the categories of: neutral, stereotyping, advocacy, empowerment, and education/awareness.

As shown in Tables 2 and 3, the number of articles exhibiting gender stereotypes decreased slightly in articles

about decision-making, social, and security issues from 2010 to 2014. The number of stereotyping messages decreased significantly in articles pertaining to women and economic participation during the same period. In addition, the total rate of articles exhibiting gender empowerment messages exceeded the rate of articles exhibiting gender stereotyping messages between 2010 and 2014. According to Table 2, the media’s efforts in awareness raising with regards to security increased from one contribution in 2010 to ten in 2014. Apart from these, media’s gender empowerment and awareness raising in other areas fluctuated throughout the investigation period. In addition, the number of analysis articles or features contributing to advocacy remained low.

a) Women and decision-making

In 2012, *The Myanmar Times* included 17 articles about women and decision making from a ‘neutral’ perspective. Just three pieces about decision-making were written in 2014, as news regarding education, empowerment, and advocacy messages increased in number. Most of the news was defined as neutral, without a specific gender focus. Particularly in 2012, although the media covered the news about the female democracy icon, Aung San Suu Kyi and her party, some of the media contributions did not include any gender-related message – for example, “the opposition party – NLD’s fundraising event” (Vol 28, Issue 557, February, 2012), “Aung San Suu Kyi took three days leave from parliament” (Vol 29, Issue 576, July, 2012).

2012 saw a spike in articles taking an empowerment perspective, which could be linked to Aung San Suu Kyi's activities, as she and her party were contested in a by-election held in April, 2012. Moreover, the news about female political candidates internationally, such as "Yingluck passes major hurdle in Thai parliament" (Vol 30, Issue 597, November, 2012); and "Park Geun-hye has won the election in South Korea" (Vol 30, Issue 600, December, 2012) created messages of empowerment by considering women's involvement in decision-making. In contrast, the rate of media coverage regarding female candidates was very low in the 2010 general election in Myanmar. By 2014, the paper covered the voices of ordinary women, moving beyond the well-known female political figures. For example, an interview with Htar Htar, a Kha Yar women's organization's leader (Vol 35, Issue 692, October, 2014), and the feature about a museum manager (Vol 35, Issue 692, October, 2014) highlight the strengths of female subjects.

Further, *The Myanmar Times* raised awareness regarding women's rights violations in an article in 2014 titled "Voting in election of Yangon Municipal committee members" (Vol 36, Issue 704, December, 2014). The article raised awareness to the public regarding the fact that women's voices were lost in the electoral process, as only one family member was allowed to vote in the election of YCDC's committee members, with families favoring men over women. Gender awareness in *The Myanmar Times* seemed to improve in 2014, with a "Women of ASEAN" special supplement (Vol 35,

Issue 684, August, 2014). The article advocated for women's participation in decision making through an analysis article.

Regarding the stereotyping messages, the study investigated one case in 2010. The feature titled "Autumn love blossoms" (Vol 27, Issue 532, July, 2010) included stereotypes of gender roles, discussing the marriage of a 40-year-old woman and a over 70-year-old male author, the women was quoted saying, "I am less educated. It is good to be the wife of a respected and famous author such as Thakhin Tin Mya (her husband). I think of him as a parent, benefactor and uncle because he treats, guides, and understands me". Those key words can be seen as disempowering women and reinforcing traditional gender roles.

In 2014, *The Myanmar Times* published an article explaining current marriage laws, while the nationalist forces were moving to ban interfaith marriages. The article did not make any comments or critiques about these laws, which have prohibited Myanmar Buddhist women from marrying people of different religions or nationalities. Although gender activists in Myanmar have issued several statements objecting to the interfaith marriage laws since 2013, the media did not published these statements or perspectives in the article.

b) Women and economic participation

In terms of women's economic participation, it was found that articles in *The Myanmar Times* often portrayed women as 'decorative items' for business promotion, rather than investigating their skills, capabilities, and power at macro

or micro economic levels. The use of female portraits in the “Lifestyle” pages utilize gender stereotypes to promote tourism, beauty products, fashion, and food and beverage products. Such stereotyping messages were mostly found in articles from 2010.

Articles also drew on ethnic culture to promote tourism. Articles such as “Taung Yoe ethnic group’s customs, literature and costumes” (Vol 29, Issue 562, March, 2012); and “Traditional Music competition to reveal ethnic culture” (Vol 30, Issue 585, September, 2012), use portrayals of ethnic women, but do not involve any messages of empowerment.

In contrast, media coverage in 2014 explored women’s empowerment in economic spheres in a different light. Contributions including “The first female GM of Chatruim Hotel” (Vol 34, Issue 657, February, 2014), “Can female bus conductors give better services to commuters?” (Vol 35, Issue 682, June, 2014) and “Four women making changes over time” (featuring the success of women’s income generation activity of LIFT project) (Vol 35, Issue 684, August, 2014) highlighted economic achievements of women. After media censorship was removed, the paper also covered stories about labor strikes, which included female labor strikes and the voices of female participants. These articles highlighted barriers to women’s economic involvement and raised awareness about unequal job opportunities, labor exploitation, and unsafe working conditions. Prior to censorship removal, the media’s engagement with labor issues was rare.

With regards to development projects, articles followed a gender neutral approach – for example, “Agriculture loans boast production” (Vol 26, Issue 507, January, 2010); “Credit is needed in delta: Tripartite Core Group's survey report” (Vol 26, Issue 509, February, 2010). The first article covered the agriculture loan program of a non-governmental agency, without mentioning how many female farmers received the loan. Similarly, the second article generalized the conditions of people affected by cyclone, who were in need of governmental assistance, in particular credit for recovery – the report did not make any reference to the required funding for women’s development activities, such as income generation schemes. It is worth considering that the gender-neutral approach may have been the result of development organizations or the reporters to include and share gender-disaggregated data. Similar gender neutral articles were found in social and security related stories in 2012 and 2014.

c) Women and social issues

Coverage on women’s roles, rights to education, and health care access did not change significantly from 2010 to 2014. Most articles regarding women’s health and education came from an awareness or empowerment perspective. News related to health issues were mostly about maternal and child health and HIV/AIDS prevention. However, media representations of child health as being the concern of women could be seen as a ‘gender stereotype’ approach. On the other hand, media promotion regarding the benefits of breastfeeding can have wider benefits for society. Articles

such as “HIV is not perilous to breast milk, says doctor” (Vol 27, Issue 528, June, 2010); “Football therapy helps women fight AIDS” (Vol 27, Issue 538, August, 2010); “HIV-free children bring hope to parents” (interview with a female with HIV about how she prevented mother-to-child HIV transmission) (Vol 27, Issue 538, August, 2010); and “Breastfeeding can reduce the risk of life of the infant” (Vol 30, Issue 586, September, 2012) provide knowledge and encouragement to women readers. In articles published in 2014, greater engagement with issues pertaining to reproductive health and sex education were found. Moreover, a feature story titled “Don’t discriminate against women with HIV” (Vol 35, Issue 684, August, 2014) advocated for the rights of women affected by HIV. In this light, the media’s stance on advocacy for women is obvious because the media did not publish a generalized story about both male and female HIV patients. Also in education, media highlighted the importance of education for women in an article “Education and labor” (Vol 35, Issue 684, August, 2014) that revealed the relation between education and low/high skilled labor. The article also discussed how many Myanmar women are working in informal sectors as unskilled laborers due to low education and capacity. However, the use of images of female teachers in the general news about primary and secondary education appears to strengthen the role of women as “teacher.”

d) Women and security

When examining articles about security issues in 2014, a gender-neutral approach was common. Gender neutral messaging includes articles that do not promote awareness, empowerment, or make use of stereotyping, but do include comments on particular women; for example, “Aung San Suu Kyi urges the government to enforce rule of law in Rakhine State” (Vol 30, Issue 594, November, 2012); and “The appeal of Phyu Hnin Phway, the activist of Lapataung mining was rejected” (Vol 35, Issue 692, October, 2014). While female voices were included in these articles, gender issues were not explored. However, the rate of news coverage about women and security in *The Myanmar Times* has grown steadily. For example, awareness about human trafficking was a significant topic within the theme of women’s security in 2010 and 2012. In addition, a number of articles analyzed called for the cooperation and collaboration among countries in the Mekong Region, and ASEAN countries, in the fight against human trafficking. It also called for compensation for women survivors of trafficking. The paper also discussed domestic violence and sexual harassment experienced by women both locally and internationally. Although ethnic conflict and anti-Muslim riots flared up in 2011 and 2012, the media’s attention to the suffering of women as a result of this conflict remained very low. Coverage highlighted the experiences of ethnic groups without a gender perspective; for example, “Kachin refugees are planning to go back to their home” (Vol 28, Issue 558, February, 2012); “Food security concerns for Kachin

refugees in coming year” (Vol 28, Issue 558, February, 2012); and “Local residents in Kachin struggle to continue their livelihoods due to displacement because of dam construction” (Vol 29, Issue 562, March, 2012).

Articles did not explore women’s voices deeply in relation to conflicts and violence, with the exception of general statements such as “most victims are women and children. They are suffering from trauma; even they cannot sleep at night due to fear” in “Rakhine refugees need food, clothes, medicines and security” article (Vol 29, Issue 574, June, 2012). Women’s voices were neglected in conflict reports; however, articles continued to refer to women and children as “victims” and “helpless and hopeless people” in conflicts. The use of pictures of women and children in a half-page article “UN will help the necessary support for emergency human security in Rakhine State” (Vol 29, Issue 574, June, 2012), and in the cover story, “After three year conflict in Kachin State” (Vol 34, Issue 676, June, 2014) are both key examples of gender stereotyping. The study has not found any examples of security related news utilizing women’s empowerment frames, with the exception of news about UNESCO giving a non-violence award to Aung San Suu Kyi (Vol 28, Issue 557, January, 2012).

5.1.1. Interpretation of words and semiotics used by media

Media representations of gender, in terms of contents and words, have improved since 2012. The publication of a

special issue titled “Women of ASEAN” (Vol 35, Issue 684, August, 2014) and the use of empowerment words (for example: “smart,” “making changes,” and “successful leadership”) are evidence that the media has attempted to change its approach towards gender development. In the special issue of “Women of ASEAN,” key concepts and laws, including “what gender is,” “what gender equality means,” and “what CEDAW is,” were explained, alongside features about women and employment, education, sexual harassment, and health. In addition to gender development, it was witnessed that the media emphasized on the use of the word “female.” The media coverage about women’s achievement looked very general in 2010 and 2012, the reports published in 2014 highlighted the word “female” in headlines to show women’s capabilities and success. For instance, “Female artists’ art exhibition showing their confidence and strength” (Vol 34, Issue 664, March, 2014); “The first female bank president in Japan” (Vol 34, Issue 664, March, 2014); and “Female drivers are given more parking space in China” (Vol 35, Issue 682, June, 2014).

However, the study has also found the use of words that could be considered explicitly sexist. For example, in the feature about Myanmar New Year Festival, the media used the phrase “lost virginity” to capture the Western cultural domination over the local festival (Vol 34, Issue 664, April, 2014). Similarly in the political features, the articles discussing the immature stage of Myanmar’s democracy used phrases likening this period to a woman after giving birth

(Thway Nu Thar Nu Democracy). In addition, the media portrayed women's dignity as "being modest" and "following the traditional rules." Such description can be seen in the article "Korea soap operas and Myanmar's society" (Vol 29, Issue 574, June, 2012) and in the interview, "How will you cultivate your daughters?" (Vol 35, Issue 684, August, 2014). Likewise, articles reinforced masculinity and femininity through interviews with male and female managers (Vol 27, Issue 532, July, 2010) that captured the male executive as being "logical," "rational," and "active"; while the female executive was characterized as being "emotional," and "sensitive." The paper was also less likely to approach women as sources of news. In particular, women's voices were rare in news contributions about decision-making, economics, and security affairs. Women were also portrayed as being helpless and weak in news coverage regarding conflicts and riots, including photos of women in vulnerable conditions. Similarly, news regarding education featured photos of women teachers, while product promotion news and beauty contest news featured sexualized images of women, reinforcing these as arenas for women.

5.1.2. Media's representation for women from different class and race/ethnicity

The Myanmar Times paper covered the news of Aung San Suu Kyi's activities following her release from house arrest in November 2010. Thus, she became the news maker –

her words and comments regarding current political, economic, and social affairs were used in headline news and cover stories. From 2012, there was an increasing trend towards publishing feature articles about other prominent female figures from local and international (but particularly, most are from international) arenas, including politics, economics, science, and arts. In 2014, the paper expanded representation, by discussing female politicians and female business executives. The paper also included discussions about ordinary women, such as the stories and voices of female authors, filmmakers, artists, sculptors, teachers, horse-cart female drivers, low-skilled laborers, farmers, peacemakers, activists from CSOs, bus conductors, and housewives. For example, the paper included a feature on a housewife in its special issue for "Women of ASEAN" (Vol 35, Issue 685, August, 2014). The article discussed a woman who raised 12 children, focusing on the children's passion, affection, and kindness and her support for them to be successful in their fields. As her husband is a low-paid government employee, she made extra income by working as a broker in car and house selling and renting. Thus, these represent an encouragement of women's involvement in leadership positions, and also domestic roles. The article thus highlights how women can make changes within and beyond traditional roles and spaces. In these features, the articles highlighted both challenges and achievements – such stories encourage the audiences to recognize women's hardships, as well as their capabilities.

However, less space and attention was given to the voices and representations of ethnic women. In Myanmar, less developed regions tend to be home to ethnic populations, and are sites of conflict and communal violence. While articles have considered poor development conditions and issues regarding conflict, the needs of women have not been covered. For example, the paper has not deeply explored issues around human rights violation against ethnic women. Rather, the paper makes general statements and uses their portraits to highlight sufferings in these less developed regions. Images of ethnic women are used to promote their traditional costumes, customs, and culture; for example, in features about traditional facial tattoo of Chin women; and about the traditions of the Taung Yoe people. These features highlight the fading traditions of the ethnic groups and the importance of retaining and reviving cultural heritage.

5.2. Findings from semi-structured interviews

a) The perspectives of respondents regarding the changes of gender representation in media from 2010 to 2014

Under this theme, the researcher and gender development agencies discussed “the organization’s purpose of the use of media;” “focused topics;” “their perspective on media coverage about gender;” and “opinion on changing media trend.” Regarding the use of media in gender development, all respondents from gender organizations agreed that the media is a strong advocacy tool. The gender

organizations interviewed subscribed to weekly papers such as *The Myanmar Times*, *The People’s Age*, *Kumudra*, and *Mizzima* to read analysis articles, and reviewed daily papers such as *Messenger*, *Crime*, *Daily Eleven*, and *7 Days* for daily updated news. These gender organizations used media for sharing information with the public, as well as collecting information, offering transparency, and monitoring the media’s activities. The use of media for sharing information includes two strategies: information about specific project activities (to promote the organization’s profiles) and awareness raising around gender issues. Offering transparency involves building trust among stakeholders, by being open about projects and activities through media and sharing with relevant authorities and partner organizations. With regards to media monitoring, one gender organization highlighted that they studied media interpretations and understandings about gender through media coverage, while another organization examined the media’s presentations and current trends in order to enhance IEC materials production - for example, ‘Thingaha’ Gender Organization examined reported cases of gender-based violence, and put some illustrations in their IEC materials to raise awareness. Thus, gender organizations were learning about current issues from the media, and used the media as a tool for social norm change and to ensure organizational accountability.

All respondents confirmed that gender representation in the media had improved since 2012. However, they indicated that there was still significant scope for further improvement.

Respondents 2 and 4 believed that the number of articles about the project activities of international organizations and government related to gender issues, had increased, but analysis pieces on current injustices, laws, policies and social practices were still few. As Respondent 4 stated:

“Currently most of the gender related activities are presented as news – just to inform public what is happening. The media talk less about why it is happening.”

Respondent 2 believed that coverage on gender related news depended on the organizations’ activities. Respondent 2 said:

“Around 2011 and 2012, there were one or two conferences or seminars relating to women’s issues in a year. More gender workshops, press conferences, or seminars have been organized from 2013; sometimes two events in a day. As long as more events are being organized, more news about the events can be seen.”

Respondent 1 and 3 felt that media personnel do not have sufficient knowledge about gender and do not have the capacity to contribute to analysis articles and features. Gender is a new subject to the media, and the media is still recovering from years of censorship. Respondent 4 pointed out that according to the nature of media, they are looking for ‘a scoop,’ thus gender issues will not always attract the interest of the media.

As a drawback of media freedom, all respondents highlighted that the removal of restriction also has served to reinforce feminine representations of women. After censorship removal in 2012, the number of women’s magazines focusing on beauty, fashion, and women’s domestic roles increased. Sexualized images and poses of women have been frequently used in women’s magazines. Yet, while censorship existed, such representations of women were banned. Respondent 3 was concerned about the open use of sexualized images in the media;

“A lot of sexual images can be seen in media. So, media freedom supports the strengthening of femininity in some ways. Some people may misunderstand freedom of expression and women’s rights movements. They may think democracy is nonsense, that it is just eroding our cultural values”.

Contrary to women’s magazines, the state run media promoted femininity in a different way, highlighting women’s roles in traditional customs, culture, and nationality, showing women wearing traditional costumes, and arguing for women to not marry with non-Myanmar. The gender organizations involved in the study criticized such representations. Also, respondents pointed out that the traditional costumes parades organized by the authorities on Myanmar Women’s Day (July 7) failed to promote gender awareness, women’s rights, or empower women.

On the other hand, the respondents felt that the reporters were becoming more aware of gender as a key issue

that should included in their articles, which was reflected in articles about gender organizations' activities as news and features about the women from senior management levels. Respondent 1 and 3 recognized some positive changes in media coverage. For example, Respondent 3 stated that

“In crime news, when the incidents became human interest news, the reporters covered such news and images without any consideration about ethical issues pertaining to respecting other people's dignities and rights. Now, ethical consideration of media persons has been improving”.

Particularly, the media attempted to avoid using the images of female victims or blurred faces in articles about murder or sexual abuse cases. However, Respondent 4 claimed that media still viewed women predominantly as victims, exploiting women's sufferings, in the belief that such coverage would be of interest to readers and such attention may bring about change and action. Thus, media photos of women in news are mainly of sex workers and refugees.

According to Respondent 2 and 4, current gender news coverage in media touches only on women, but does not engage with other gender minority issues, such as discussions on LGBTIQ rights. Moreover, those two respondents pointed out that most of the media coverage about women's empowerment is focused on women from upper class, with few stories about women at the grassroots. Coverage regarding ethnic women's issues also focused only on their culture and costumes, and not on their concerns and hopes.

b) The engagement of gender organization with media

In this investigation, the study focused on the recent engagement of the organizations with the media, their future plan, and policy recommendation for the improvement of media. The study found that of the four organizations interviewed, three gender organizations have strong relationship with media persons through the Myanmar Journalism Network (MJN), while the remaining organization has not prepared a clear strategy to build close tie relationship with media, but did approach the media when required. In respect of media engagement, organizations were utilizing two key strategies: providing gender training to media persons, and publishing their own gender newsletters and magazines to be circulated among gender activist networks. Gender organizations have provided some gender awareness training workshops to media persons since 2011. In addition, gender activists give guest lectures, weekly training, and workshops at MJN. One of the organizations has prepared guidelines for media engagement for their own organization – including defining key spokespeople and outlining key terminology. These guidelines are intended to help avoid the use of discriminatory terms and misinformation. Respondent 4 posited that each organization should have their own media engagement plan and build their understanding of the nature of the media. In that respondent's view, most media interviews fail to explore the strength of female leaders and women's rights activists. As such, this suggests that the

representative women and gender organizations should have a media strategy that can guide key messages.

Regarding the current national policy about gender equality, respondents gave insightful recommendations. Respondent 1 maintained that the government is mainly responsible for making a policy that can enhance journalistic freedom when covering culturally sensitive gender issues. Respondent 2 and 4 suggested that the government should limit the use of sexualized portraits in media, seeing this as a means of reinforcing stereotypes. Further, the government should provide laws and guidelines to prevent women from being exploited in media. Respondent 4 argued that this should include strategies to protect the rights to privacy of women and strategies to ensure women's dignity is maintained. Respondent 3 believed that this advocacy is not the role of gender organizations alone, and that media persons' should also encourage the government to strengthen laws and national policy, while women's rights in the media are still weak.

The organizations interviewed intended to continue building their relationships with media outlets. They aim to build a strong relationship with the media by involving the media in public or organizational events. As Respondent 2 stated,

“We are engaging with at least one media event a week, getting involved in their interviews or press release. We also

facilitate the media to get on the right track when they cover gender issues.”

c) The influence of media in gender development

In this part, the study explored the development agencies' perspective on the role of media for gender development and their experience in media engagement. Gender activists have struggled to lobby policy and perspective change regarding gender sensitive issues to decision makers, although the media has provided a space for these organizations to raise awareness regarding inequality and to make policy recommendations. Respondent 1 said that:

“We cannot advocate to change traditional perspectives through the media that has limited women's role, because cultural and religious values are highly regarded here than in other issues....we can engage with the promotion of women's rights in education and health care services. This is the delicate way that we can use media as an advocacy tool.”

The remaining organizations also affirmed that advocacy for policy change was an ongoing challenge – all gender organizations felt the ongoing need to fight against unjust laws, which limit women's rights and a collective voice of women. On the other hand, the respondents confirmed that gender development agencies in Myanmar have the media's support in raising gender awareness to the public, particularly with regards to “Education about CEDAW” (Respondent 1), “Women and peace” (Respondent 2), “Prevention on sexual

harassment” “(Respondent 3), and “Women’s participation in 2015 election” (Respondent 4).

The most challenging issue that the gender organizations reported with regards to dealing with the media is the limited knowledge about gender among reporters and other media staff. Respondent 3 asserted that even media persons cannot overcome deep-rooted, traditional gender norms situated within traditional stereotypes, despite receiving gender awareness training. This lack of knowledge is a barrier to contributing to in-depth analysis. Respondent 1 and 4 experienced that occasionally newsroom editors and reporters edit or cut out the key messages due to space limitation, and sometimes the reporters took a more human-interest angle when discussing women. Respondent 2 pointed out that the media has sometimes included misinformation, as they have misinterpreted information, or failed to seek confirmation from key organizations. Yet, the respondents acknowledged the current increase in media coverage about gender related activities and events, and welcomed the gender sections that have been included in publications *Mizzima*, *Irrawaddy*, and special issues of *The Myanmar Times*. Further, they argued that although gender stereotyping is common, practices have improved since 2012. Overall, respondents had a positive view about the future of the media’s involvement in issues pertaining to gender development.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the findings presented above, the study clearly documents positive improvements in gender-related reporting. However, the study also revealed some gaps in the engagement between the gender organizations and the media agencies, and some failures to achieve gender development goals. The following section discusses these key findings and their implications.

a) Changes of the media’s trend

The content analysis showed that the media contribution of *The Myanmar Times* in terms of gender development (particularly in gender awareness making and empowerment) has been improving since 2012. While there were still issues with gender-related coverage, the study found an increase in published news, articles, and features, which promoted gender awareness to the public. The paper covered the various voices: from ordinary housewives to the lives of female entrepreneurs. According to the findings in Table 2 and 3, the rate of media coverage about gender with an educational purpose was at its height in 2014 across each of the key themes: women and decision-making, economic participation, social, and security issues. Regarding gender empowerment and stereotyping, media trends changed slightly after 2012. For example, the paper included an interview with executives in 2010 (Vol 27, Issue 532, July, 2010) that compared and contrasted male and female managers’ capabilities – but that interview presented female leadership in a negative light,

highlighting women as “emotional” and “sensitive. ” In contrast, the interview with the same female executive in 2014 (Vol 35, Issue 684, July, 2014) made a positive contribution to gender empowerment. The article revealed the struggle this woman had experienced and highlighted her achievements. Similarly, the paper published a brief article about “female farm workers’ fashion contest” in 2012 (Vol 29, Issue 578, July, 2012). In 2014, news about the contest (Vol 34, Issue 663, March, 2014) also discussed the life, struggles and dreams of these female farm workers. In addition to gender empowerment, it was found that the media emphasized the word “female” in key article titles.

b) Media, culture, and knowledge production

The study examined how the media produced a new form of knowledge for gender equality, based on existing culture and knowledge. The media has emphasized gender empowerment since 2012; but as mentioned in Section 5.1.1 (Interpretation of words and semiotics used by media), above, the study found evidence of stereotyping practices through words and pictures. According to the study findings, the media acknowledged the traditional role of women (as being housewives), but also promoted women’s decision-making power and economic participation. For example, the paper published a story on a housewife in 2014, which discussed how she managed a big family successfully (Vol 35, Issue 685, August, 2014). In this light, it can be said that the media is promoting the role of women within traditional boundaries. That sort of perspective might be viewed differently from a

Western perspective, because Western feminism encourages women to move beyond traditional roles. However, in taking a holistic view, this framing of women as housewives can be seen as being respectful of existing local cultures, while considering approaches to gender empowerment and production of new knowledge regarding gender equality by the Myanmar media.

In contrast, some of the media’s contributions seemed to be following the market demand for particular articles and representations. Such market demand produces two kinds of representations; empowering and stereotyping. For instance, the news about the opposition party leader, Aung San Suu Kyi was intended to attract the readers’ attention. News including “Aung San Suu Kyi that was offered Global Thinker award by US Foreign Policy Magazine in 2012” (Vol 30, Issue 597, November, 2012) can inspire and empower female audiences. On the other hand, the news, articles, and images in “Life Style” pages and “Wedding” special issues strengthened cultural norms of femininity, since female models are mainly used to promote new fashion and beauty products. Also, the papers included articles and photos of women in poor conditions to attract readers’ attention. Such media dispatches strengthen the view of women as vulnerable.

There is a tension between representing reality and promoting stereotypes. According to Danica Minić, media representations are not a reflection of reality, but a social practice of looking for and assigning sense and meaning to reality.[\[49\]](#) That practice is determined by the existing

relations of power within society. The media may argue that the reason they include photos of women and children in conflicts, riots, and disasters is to make people aware of current issues. However, when the research investigated the news and article contributions about the conflict situation, it was found that only the photos of women and children were included – their voices, words, and perspectives were excluded. The study found that the media tended to generalize the concerns and sufferings of affected people in news regarding conflict. Articles rarely used gender disaggregated data in news related to disasters or international aid. Thus, conflict-related coverage promoted stereotypes of women as victims. In this way, the media tends to reinforce societal perspectives of women as “weak” and “helpless.” Moreover, in an article discussing marriage laws (published in 2014), the media did not cover the perspectives of gender activists regarding the interfaith marriage laws, or any critiques of the laws. Thus, findings suggest that the media’s approach to gender development did not overcome market demands or traditional norms in many cases.

c) The gaps between gender development organizations and media

Based on the findings from the content analysis and semi-structured interviews, the study found some gaps in the way gender organizations engaged with the media. Improvements are needed in the knowledge and awareness of journalists and the key messages shared by gender organizations. Confirming findings from the content analysis,

gender activists pointed out that many articles still fail to overcome traditional norms. Despite some basic gender training, journalists may be unaware of stereotyping practices in their contributions. The media is still weak in covering issues regarding women at grassroots, ethnic minority women (except promotion of their culture and costumes), and other gender minorities. Due to difficulties in overcoming market demand, findings suggest that gender agencies should prepare communication strategies to share or key messages that can attract the audiences within the limitations of print media. Another thing that the study witnessed is that the media rarely used gender disaggregated data in most of their reports. For example, gender related issues or data were not found in the news of development organizations: “Agriculture loans boast production” (Vol 26, Issue 507, January, 2010); “Credit is needed in delta: Tripartite Core Group's survey report” (Vol 26, Issue 509, February, 2010); and “UN will help the necessary support for emergency human security in Rakhine state” (Vol 29, Issue 574, June, 2012); “Su foundation was established for education and health care development” (Vol 34, Issue 664, March, 2014). Generalizations by the media showed that key messages of the organizations, as well as the gender awareness of media persons, still needs improvement.

d) Conclusion

The media contributions in these focal areas have increased by 30 percent from 2010 to 2014. In the analysis of the ways in which gender issues were represented, the media paid more attention to education and gender empowerment in

2014. Stereotyping practices have decreased in contributions regarding decision-making, economic participation, and social issues, but were still found in conflict reports, and in the use of images of women in vulnerable conditions. Further, media remains weak in contributing stories for advocacy purposes and in covering ethnic women's issues.

With regards to gender development agencies, their efforts to provide gender awareness training to journalists have resulted in the rise in the number of gender related news items. However, gender activists have been competing with market demand and the promotion of stereotypical representations of women in beauty and fashion magazines. Since the media's intention is often to boost their market, gender topics are not always a priority – sometimes, gender related news is given a small space in the paper. This points to the need for gender development organizations to strengthen their relationship with the media by providing more gender training and by conducting media monitoring. The findings also indicate the value of development organizations in preparing key messages to attract media interest in the most effective way within a limited space. Moreover, some gender development organizations maintained that they are advocating to strengthen laws to prohibit sexual discrimination and the exploitation of women through images in publications. For this to happen, the gender development organizations will need the coordination and cooperation of media agencies to encourage policy makers to establish gender-related standards in media regulations.

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